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P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
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NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN, BARGHOUT
INL FOR A/S JOHNSON
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA
STATE PASS USAID FOR LAUDATO/NANDY/SCOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: NDI DELEGATION HEADED BY MADELEINE
ALBRIGHT VISITS BEIRUT

REF: A. BEIRUT 263
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 247

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Beirut May 5-8 as the co-chair of a high-profile team (with former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark) to assess preparations for the June 7 parliamentary elections on behalf of the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The delegation met with President Sleiman, PM Siniora, Speaker Berri, Parliament Majority Leader Saad Hariri, Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud, Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea during the visit. The group also met ministers, MPs, and various other leaders from the women's, civil society, and international communities during a May 6 reception hosted by the Ambassador. The delegation held a press conference on May 7 (NDI statement contained in para 11). End summary.

GOL MAKING GOOD EFFORTS
ON ELECTION PLANNING

[1](#)2. (SBU) Secretary Albright co-led a high-profile team with former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark to assess preparations for the June 7 parliamentary elections on behalf of NDI. In a May 7 press conference, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright held a Q and A session with journalists concerning the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) upcoming mission to observe the June 7 parliamentary elections.

[1](#)3. (SBU) During the press conference, Albright briefed journalists on NDI's pre-election assessment. In the statement, Albright praised the GOL for recent and positive electoral reforms that represent improvements over past elections. This includes forming an election supervisory committee, establishing campaign finance and media regulations, and accrediting domestic and international observers. Albright also praised Minister of Interior Ziyad Baroud's impartial planning of the elections.

NDI CRITICIZES

HIZBALLAH'S WEAPONS

¶4. (SBU) However, Albright also stated some of NDI's concerns with the manner in which the elections were being prepared. In particular, Albright expressed the NDI team's alarm about the presence of weapons, noting that NDI's evaluation of the Lebanese electoral system faces challenges in the wake of the presence of arms in the possession of political parties. She added that the presence of arms also creates challenges for international observation delegations.

Albright noted that while the Lebanese Armed Forces would keep peace during the elections, "one party possessed military and armed strength which is not under state control," a reference to Hizballah's arsenal.

¶5. (SBU) Albright also expressed the delegation's apprehension over the non-completion of the formation of the Constitutional Council. The Council will play a critical role in the elections, as it provides the only legal recourse for adjudicating challenges to the electoral results-- Refs A and B. (Note: Parliament underwent a contentious, politicized process to name its five members, and the cabinet has not yet nominated, or even discussed, the five remaining appointments. End note.) NDI cited the need for the Ministry of Interior to educate voters before the June 7 election day.

PRESS REACTIONS TO ALBRIGHT VISIT

¶6. (SBU) Most newspapers covered Albright's visit to various Lebanese politicians, in addition to the joint press

conference. Pro-opposition Al-Akhbar newspaper noted that Albright repeated several times that she did not represent the USG. Al-Akhbar also reported that the USG will decide its policies based on the results of the elections.

¶7. (SBU) Moderate, anti-Syrian, An-Nahar reported that Secretary Albright indicated that NDI is looking for as much transparency as possible in the election process. An-Nahar highlighted Secretary Albright's emphasis that the Lebanese should have the right to determine their own future. An-Nahar also highlighted her praise for the steps that were taken by the Lebanese community towards political reform, particularly what the Boutros Commission did to highlight the representational quality of elected members of parliament.

ALBRIGHT MEETS POLITICAL ELITE

¶8. (SBU) The delegation met with President Sleiman, PM Siniora, Speaker Berri, Parliament Majority Leader Saad Hariri, Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud, Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea during the three-day visit. In a May 6 reception hosted by the Ambassador, Albright met with a number of Lebanese ministers including, Information Minister Tarek Mitri, Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar, Education Minister Bahia Hariri, and Finance Minister Mohammed Chatah. Albright also met at the reception MPs Misbah Ahdab (independent, pro-March 14), Anwar al-Khalil (Amal, March 8), Marwan Hamade (Progressive Socialist Party, March 14), Hagop Pakradounian (Tashnaq, pro-Aoun). Civil society representatives also attended the reception including Ziyad Abda Samad, Secretary General of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE); Dr. Khalil Gebrara, former head of the Lebanese Transparency Association and current member of the GOL's Supervisory Electoral Commission; and members of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)funded Youth Shadow Government.

DIPLOMATS WILL NOT RECEIVE ACCREDITATION TO MONITOR ELECTIONS

¶9. (SBU) In a May 6 conference attended by the Ambassador and

other foreign Chiefs of Mission, and hosted by the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL), Michael Williams, the Director of the newly established Election Observation Unit at the Ministry of Interior, Makram Ouweis, briefed donors on the role of the unit and its work so far. Ouweis said that foreign diplomats will not be accredited to enter polling stations on June 7. Only those diplomats who are officially part of a high level delegation of foreign parliamentarians and ministers, or members of an NGO such as NDI or Carter Center will be accredited, he said. Last minute, high-level delegations, can receive accreditation on a case-by-case basis, according to Ouweis.

¶10. (SBU) He added that all accredited monitors will have to submit individual applications and sign a Code of Ethics pledge to receive official accreditation from the Ministry. The Observation unit is planning to accredit more than 3000 domestic observers, 200 international observers, and 200 media representatives. The international observation missions that have applied for accreditation so far, include delegations from NDI, the Carter Center, the EU, the Arab League, and Turkey.

TEXT OF OFFICIAL NDI STATEMENT

¶11. (U) Begin text: In one month, the Lebanese people will go to the polls to elect a new parliament. They will do so under a new electoral law and administration agreed upon by all political contestants. This represents a significant step toward greater transparency and confidence in the process and the development of Lebanon and its institutions as a sovereign state. Too often Lebanon has been defined by events and actors outside the country's borders. The

National Democratic Institute is part of a growing network of friends of Lebanon who agree that Lebanon's people alone should determine the country's future.

Lebanon's history and sectarian divisions have given rise to a unique electoral system based on an allocation of seats along confessional lines. It includes elements of competition, and, when conducted peacefully, can lead to outcomes accepted as representative by voters and political competitors. Over the past several years there has been a growing movement for political reform led by civil society groups. This effort led to the establishment of the Butros Commission, which recommended major changes in the electoral system, including proportional representation, that could, over time, lead to strengthened institutions of representative government.

Some reforms were adopted by parliament and a number of improvements were approved for this election cycle, which, it is hoped, will pave the way for broader changes after the upcoming polls. This is a process we encourage. Recent and positive electoral reforms that represent improvements over past elections include the following:

- Formation of an election supervisory committee. The Supervisory Committee on the Electoral Campaign (SCEC) falls short of an independent electoral commission but sets an important precedent as an intermediary body that could serve as a precursor to such a commission as was the case in Mexico in the 1990s. It is responsible for ensuring the implementation of Chapters 5 and 6 of the electoral law, which stipulate campaign finance and media regulations.

- Impartial administration. The Minister of the Interior, who is ultimately charged with the administration of the elections, was in our discussions widely viewed as impartial, professional and committed to administering a transparent and credible process.

- Campaign finance and media regulations. Newly-enacted campaign finance regulations, although diluted by significant loopholes, set a key precedent by mandating expenditure limits. Meanwhile, media regulations seek to ensure the

candidates, fair and equal access to all media outlets. While questions remain regarding enforcement of the new rules, most parties and candidates have welcomed the changes.

- Accreditation of domestic and international observers. The June 7 elections will be the first in Lebanon's history in which the Council of Ministers issued a decree allowing the Minister of Interior to accredit international observers. The electoral law also allows domestic election observation. This initiative brings an added degree of transparency to the process and helps to build confidence in the elections by Lebanese citizens.

At the same time, assessing the Lebanese electoral system in relation to international norms and standards presents a challenge for international observation. The Lebanese army is charged with maintaining order around the elections, but one of the political contestants maintains a major armed force not under the control of the state. Other parties also possess arms of various sizes and capabilities. Given the allocation of parliamentary seats by district and along confessional lines, and a "winner take all" majoritarian system, the results are all but predetermined in an overwhelming majority of the races.

The lack of pre-printed ballots can compromise secrecy of the vote and strengthens the power of political elites creating the opportunity for deal-making and undue influence of voters. Moreover, the drawing of district lines has led to large discrepancies in the number of voters per district and therefore to unequal weight given to each vote. Voters register and vote in their ancestral villages rather than their place of residence, requiring them to travel long distances and, in some cases to areas now dominated by another confessional group. Moreover, women are required to

vote in the ancestral home of their husbands. All of the above-mentioned issues have been part of the Lebanese electoral reform debate. While further reforms can be considered following the upcoming polls, there are a number of steps that could be taken between now and June 7 to further enhance the credibility of the elections:

- The ability to challenge and adjudicate election results. According to Lebanese law, the Constitutional Council (comprised of 10 members-five elected by parliament and five appointed by the Council of Ministers) is charged with accrediting the entire process through resolving voting disputes after the polls. However, the Council has yet to be formed, with many observers concerned that it will not be established by election day. The delegation hopes that a means will be found between now and June 7 to break the existing political deadlock and that the Council will be established and fulfill its mandate.

- Logistical and security issues. Holding elections in a single day rather than on consecutive weekends is one of the newly-enacted reforms; however it entails major logistical challenges. The election authorities recognize that given the large-scale movement of voters around the elections and closely contested races in certain districts, plans must be put in place to ensure adequate voter mobility and security. Mobilizing an estimated 30,000 security forces (both the army and police) will require significant management and coordination efforts by the Defense and Interior ministries. The delegation also hopes that the Interior Ministry will take all appropriate measures under its authority against those who may violate electoral law during this critical pre-election period. Voter security and a peaceful election environment can be further enhanced with the adoption by the political parties of a code of conduct) an initiative now being advanced by the Minister of the Interior.

- Voter education. NDI's long-term observers report a need for greater information for candidates, parties and the public on the specifics of the new election law and note that there is confusion about the role of district and local officials in the election process. The delegation hopes that

between now and election day, the election authorities could expand the education campaign they launched earlier to better inform election workers and voters about new regulations.
End text.

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